

New Internet technology could aid police, courts and prisons

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New Internet-based technology may aid criminal justice agencies through tools such as better criminal databases, remotely conducted criminal trials and electronic monitoring of parolees in the community, according to a new RAND Corporation study.

Top criminal justice priorities for new Internet tools include developing a common criminal history record that can be shared across agencies, developing real-time language translation tools and improved video displays for [law enforcement officers](#) to adapt to changing needs, according to the analysis.

"The criminal justice field has mostly been reactive to new technology developments such as smart phones and social media," said John S. Hollywood, lead author of the report and a senior operations researcher at RAND, a nonprofit research organization. "We've developed a road map of how new Internet-based technologies might help law enforcement in the future, as well as set priorities for the improvements that are needed most."

Researchers say that while there are many promising technologies that could aid the criminal justice field, many of the developments raise issues related to civil rights, privacy rights and cybersecurity that must be addressed before the improvements can be fully realized.

The RAND report is based upon feedback from an expert panel of 16 practitioners and technology experts convened to discuss what upcoming

Internet technologies may be valuable and what the technology likely will do for criminal justice efforts.

The panel included members from groups such as International Association of Chiefs of Police and the American Probation and Parole Association, as well as technology experts from groups such as IBM and the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

The report outlines an array of scenarios where Web-enabled technology may aid those in the [criminal justice system](#). For example, in the future, police officers may be able to gesture at a self-driving car to bring it to a stop or move a self-driving vehicle that blocks a fire hydrant.

The top law enforcement priority was for help with policies and procedures to interact with driverless vehicles.

"Just how will an officer signal instructions to self-driving cars, such as when officers are controlling traffic at intersections?" Hollywood said. "This and many other questions about law enforcement and driverless vehicles need to be addressed."

Another priority identified by the panel was the creation of a criminal record that integrates information from multiple agencies.

"Criminal records today are incomplete and the records we do have are generally based locally," Hollywood said. "What we need is an ability to get information about a person's criminal history quickly and reliably, even when they move across city or state lines."

Panel members also endorsed improving education across the [criminal justice](#) system about key Web-enabled technologies such as sensors and video conferencing. In addition, there is a need for better high-speed Internet connections across the system in order to make use of the new

tools.

Other specific [law enforcement](#) priorities include biometric sensors that police or correction officers could wear to monitor heartbeat and other vital signs, automatically calling for help if monitoring suggests an officer has been injured or is having a heart attack.

For courts, technology may be able to help ease case backlogs by making it possible for witnesses to testify remotely or even have whole trials done remotely. Better electronic scheduling also could improve the operation of courts.

Jails and prisons could be aided by improved Internet connectivity that allows prisoners to stay in touch with community service providers and parole officers prior to their release. Setting up video connections to prisoners was the top-ranked need from the panel. Technology also could make house arrest more secure, thereby keeping low-level offenders from being sent to crowded jails.

Despite the optimism, the panel of experts said the technologies envisioned raised issues related to both civil and privacy rights. Standards must be agreed upon that enable use of the technologies, while also assuring that they are not used inappropriately, such as to monitor lawful activities.

"There needs to be agreed upon limits on some of the technologies so that they are not used to limit the privacy and civil rights of innocent people," Hollywood said. "In addition, there need to be security standards to make sure that as more information is collected, the information is adequately protected from hacking."

More information: The study, "Using Future Internet Technologies to Strengthen Criminal Justice," can be found at www.rand.org

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